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## **NEW WEB-BASED SYSTEM TO BE DEMONSTRATED IN YAKIMA, AIMS TO SIMPLIFY DOCTORS' COMPUTERIZED BILLING, CLAIMS**

**YAKIMA** -- A coalition of state agencies will sponsor demonstrations in Yakima this week of a breakthrough that could hold the key to drastically simplify and cut the cost of compliance with a new federal law that is changing the way health information will be handled in the future.

Under the proposal, physicians and other health-care providers could avoid the expense and hassle of investing in new software and computer equipment and simply rely on a web-based interface to send bills and claims to payer systems like Medicaid.

"This would be a tremendous savings for all kinds of providers, from hospitals to individual doctor's offices," said Kathleen Connor, HIPAA Project Manager for Medicaid at the Department of Social and Health Services. "Since it is a solution that is being developed by Washington and other states, it also should be in the public domain and available to everyone."

HIPAA stands for the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, which was passed in response to complaints from the health-care industry that more than 25 cents of every health-care dollar is wasted on administrative overhead, much of it caused by the more than 400 coding format systems in operation. HIPAA's intent was to move the entire industry on to a single compliant computerized form so that bills, claims and payments could be exchanged easily, quickly and cheaply.

The web-based direct data entry demonstration will be part of a presentation to closing sessions of the Joint Conference of the Washington Public Health Association in Yakima on Wednesday morning, outlining HIPAA compliance efforts by different state agencies. It will be followed by an expanded presentation later that afternoon during a special Eastern Washington HIPAA Readiness Forum, also in the Convention Center.

The demonstration will be conducted by Lisa Miller, Chief Operations Officer for Washington Publishing Co., a Bellevue contractor working with Washington state on its HIPAA compliance.

"If you can get to the web, you will be able to use this system," Miller said. "And we're talking little to no cost, by comparison to enormously expensive conversions or purchases."

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The nation faces its first HIPAA deadline in October 2002, when all entities defined as health plans and providers under the law must adopt new computer codes and other transaction and system changes. These changes will not only affect big payer systems like Medicaid, Medicare, Blue Cross-type plans and other health insurance companies and HMOs, but will reach down through every level of health care.

Ultimately, HIPAA will impact clinics, hospitals, and private insurance plans, as well as individual doctor's offices and many government social services such as drug abuse prevention programs, mental health care, and public health.

The next HIPAA deadline comes in April 2003, when new privacy rules go into effect, making sure that confidential medical records – even though more easily accessible in an electronic age – are better protected and are not disclosed improperly.

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT FORUMS WILL PROVIDE HIPAA GUIDANCE**

The Wednesday demonstrations will be followed in Yakima by a second HIPAA-related event on Thursday, Oct. 11. The state is sponsoring the first of three orientation seminars for local government representatives involved in HIPAA assessments and compliance. The other two seminars will be held in Olympia on October 19 and in Spokane on November 9.

The Yakima seminar will be held at the Yakima YWCA, 15 N. Naches, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The seminar will outline the requirements of the federal law and give local program representatives a basis for beginning their own compliance efforts. Sessions will include detailed discussions of the major HIPAA rules on transactions and privacy, as well as a third area, security. The latter rule is still being finalized, although a draft is circulating now.

The event is free and open to anyone with a HIPAA interest. Pre-registration is requested only to make sure that enough materials are on hand for participants. Information about all three seminars is available on the Internet at <http://maa.dshs.wa.gov/dshshipaa> Participants also can call Jim Stevenson at (360) 902-7604 or e-mail him at [stevejh2@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:stevejh2@dshs.wa.gov)

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### **HIPAA BOOKMARK:**

**ON THE INTERNET:** A Washington state Internet page is open to both public and private segments of the health-care industry with an interest in HIPAA. The site includes a wealth of HIPAA information, including updates, assessment tools, backgrounds, questions and answers, and links to other HIPAA sites around the country. The page is available at <http://maa.dshs.wa.gov/dshshipaa>